



**HAL**  
open science

**“Either his notion weakens, or his discernings / Are  
lethargied”: Sleeplessness and Waking Dreams as  
Tragedy in Julius Caesar and King Lear**

Claude Fretz

► **To cite this version:**

Claude Fretz. “Either his notion weakens, or his discernings / Are lethargied”: Sleeplessness and Waking Dreams as Tragedy in Julius Caesar and King Lear. *Etudes Epistémè: revue de littérature et de civilisation (XVIe - XVIIIe siècles)*, 2016, 30, 10.4000/episteme.1383 . hprints-03437605

**HAL Id: hprints-03437605**

**<https://hal-hprints.archives-ouvertes.fr/hprints-03437605v1>**

Submitted on 20 Nov 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Études Épistémè

Revue de littérature et de civilisation (XVIe – XVIIIe siècles)

30 | 2016

Perception and the Senses

La nuit des sens: Rêves et illusions des sens en Angleterre et en Europe à la période moderne

---

## “Either his notion weakens, or his discernings / Are lethargied”: Sleeplessness and Waking Dreams as Tragedy in *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*

*“Either his notion weakens, or his discernings / Are lethargied”*: Insomnie et rêves hallucinatoires comme tragédie dans *Julius Caesar* et *King Lear*

CLAUDE FRETZ

<https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.1383>

---

### Résumés

English Français

Drawing on the early modern physiological understanding of sleeplessness and hallucinations, this article examines how Shakespeare’s dramatic representations of insomnia and waking dreams support his tragedies’ iconic emphasis on bodily and mental suffering. To that end, I consider Brutus’s insomnia and the nightly appearance of Caesar’s ghost in *Julius Caesar*, as well as King Lear’s sleeplessness and his ontological uncertainty about whether his misfortune may be a dream. Whereas Brutus’s vision of Caesar’s ghost is often interpreted as a supernatural visitation, I argue that it can equally be read as a physiological hallucination caused by Brutus’s sleeplessness. Meanwhile I propose that King Lear’s sleeplessness and the metaphorical description of his waking reality as a dream form part of Shakespeare’s design of Lear’s tragedy as one that is primarily concerned with the character’s experience of suffering. In *King Lear*, I also show how ideas of sleeping and dreaming introduce tragicomic elements which, however, ultimately give further magnitude to the sense of pain and injustice.



En s’appuyant sur la compréhension physiologique de l’insomnie et des hallucinations au temps

de Shakespeare, cet article étudie comment les représentations dramatiques d'insomnie et de rêves hallucinatoires renforcent l'accent distinctif placé dans les tragédies de Shakespeare sur la souffrance physique et mentale. À cet effet, sont analysées l'insomnie de Brutus et l'apparition nocturne du fantôme de César dans *Jules César*, ainsi que la privation de sommeil du Roi Lear et son incertitude ontologique quant à la nature potentiellement onirique de ses épreuves. Alors que le fantôme de César est souvent interprété comme une visitation surnaturelle, on suggère ici qu'il peut aussi être interprété comme une hallucination provoquée par l'insomnie de Brutus. En outre, notre article montre que l'insomnie du Roi Lear et la description métaphorique de sa réalité comme une forme de rêve sont constitutives de cette tragédie qui met en scène l'expérience de la souffrance. Dans *King Lear*, on verra toutefois que les images de rêves et de sommeil introduisent aussi des éléments tragi-comiques qui renforcent le sentiment de douleur et d'injustice.

---

## Entrées d'index

**Mots-clés :** Shakespeare, insomnie, rêves, tragédie, Jules César, Roi Lear

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, insomnia, dreams, tragedy, Julius Caesar, King Lear

---

## Texte intégral

1 Shakespeare often used sleep, dreams, and sensory illusions for comic effect when he subjected his characters to amusing forms of cognitive bewilderment, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1591) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595). The themes of sleep, dreams, and false sensory perception, however, also offered great tragic potential, and Shakespeare fully explored this possibility when he dramatised Brutus's inability to sleep and the nightly appearance of Caesar's ghost in *Julius Caesar* (1599), and, later in his career, King Lear's sleeplessness and the character's ontological uncertainty about whether his misfortune may be a dream (4.217-225).<sup>1</sup> In both of these plays, the protagonists' tragic fates are exacerbated by physiological discourses that focus not only on their sleeplessness, but also on their literal or metaphorical waking dreams as both Brutus and Lear come to question their sensory experience and perception. This is important, because, in early modern medical discourse, waking dreams or hallucinations were in fact seen as symptoms of sleep deficiency, and both ailments were linked to humoral imbalances, as the first section of this article will reveal. Building on that background, I will suggest that Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* (1605-1606), makes use of this physiological notion in order to intensify the mental and bodily sufferings produced by the plays' tragic events. A discussion of Shakespeare's application of this strategy to Brutus and Lear allows for unique insights into two tragic heroes whose downfalls or punishments are more problematic than those of characters like Richard III and Macbeth, who are more clear-cut villains and therefore incur a greater degree of culpability; Lear is a rash character who eventually repents, and Brutus helps drive a plot which, as David Daniell writes, "expresses ambivalence," because it remains unclear whether or not Caesar deserved to die.<sup>2</sup> This nebulous nature of culpability and tragic causality makes it difficult to find any metaphysical or universal justice in these plays; as a consequence, the intense sufferings of Brutus and Lear become all the more important both to the plays' complexities and to their dramatic success.

2 Even though dreams, sleep, and the genre of tragedy have all been studied individually in relation to Shakespeare's works, the connections between them have remained largely unexplored. Critics have linked the states of dreaming and sleeping to Shakespeare's mode of romance, or more generally to the indeterminate conception of genre towards the end of his career; and work has also been undertaken on the links between nightmares, sleeplessness, fear, and conscience mainly in *Richard III* (c. 1593),



*Hamlet* (c. 1600-1601), and *Macbeth* (1606).<sup>3</sup> In addition, Elisabeth Bronfen and Tanya Pollard have written respectively about how sleep and dreams are used to help combine comic and tragic themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606).<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's depiction of sleep, sleeplessness, and waking dreams as part of a wider emphasis on his characters' sufferings – and thus as part of his deliberate design of tragedy – has, however, lacked critical attention, particularly with regard to plays other than *Macbeth*.

<sup>3</sup> Pain, suffering, and extreme states of body and mind, which in turn lead to extreme courses of action, have long been recognised as central components of Shakespeare's tragedies.<sup>5</sup> Recent criticism, moreover, has shown an interest in the ways in which Shakespeare draws on the medical discourses of his time to convey his characters' states of body and mind. Allison P. Hobgood, for example, has argued that *Macbeth* is "obsessed with ailment, disease, and biological breakdown," and that the ailments represented in the play can be traced back to the condition of fear, both in the medical literature of the time and in Shakespeare's text itself.<sup>6</sup> In *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare similarly exploits the dramatic potential offered by early modern physiological understandings when he uses sleep, sleeplessness, and hallucinations to help foreground his characters' tragic suffering which, in both of these plays, arises from the gap between their aspirations and their abilities or possibilities. Ultimately, representations of sleeplessness and waking dreams in these plays therefore also support Shakespeare's post-classical model of tragedy, which complicates ideas of cosmic adversity or metaphysical punishment and instead emphasises the suffering caused by the characters' failure to realise their aspirations.

<sup>4</sup> The differences between Shakespearean tragedy and classical and medieval models, which tend to be more interested in metaphysical perspectives and in themes of determinism, fortune, or supernatural intervention, have been widely noted in criticism. Comparing classical tragedy with Shakespearean tragedy, Michael Silk, for example, cites Hegel's characterisation of the Shakespearean model as "modern tragedy" and describes it as concerned with "inward feeling and private preoccupations"; this contrasts with the focus of Greek drama on the "cosmic wheel of Justice".<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, Michael Alexander writes that "Shakespeare had a more complex idea of character than is found in Sophocles, Aeschylus or Euripides," and Tom McAlindon emphasises Shakespeare's distinct interest in experience and psychology when he argues that, even as Shakespearean tragedy builds on the medieval Fall of Princes tradition by "focus[ing] on the phenomenon of change", that very change "here is not just one of worldly fortunes; it is above all else interpersonal, moral, and psychological change".<sup>8</sup> In *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, physiological discourses of sleeplessness and waking dreams help Shakespeare highlight these inward or psychological pains and conflicts that arise from the characters' actions, and thus from within human characters themselves.

## I

<sup>5</sup> Medical works in the Renaissance were heavily influenced by the legacy of the Greco-Roman physician Galen, amongst whose principles can be found the six non-naturals; in contrast to the naturals (innate and physiological things like organs and humours), these were conceived of as non-innate material, physical, and environmental factors that man could actively influence: "air", "movement and rest," "food and drink," "inanition and repletion", "affections of the mind", and, crucially to this discussion, "sleep and vigil".<sup>9</sup> The non-naturals, when properly applied, were thought to help balance the humours and thereby assure a good physical and spiritual health. Early modern physiologists in that respect widely recognised that sleep helped maintain the humoral balance, facilitated digestion, and allowed the body to regenerate itself: Sir



Thomas Elyot stated that sleep kept the “humours temperate”; Philippe de Mornay wrote that the heart “enricheth & furnisheth himself” during sleep; and Levinus Lemnius defined sleep as “a resting of the Animal facultie, and a Pawsing from the actions and busynes of the day, wherby the vertues of the bodyes being faynt, and the powers thereof beinge resolued, are reuyued and made fresh againe, and all the wearie members & Senses recomforted”.<sup>10</sup> Any improper application of the non-naturals, however, including inappropriate patterns of sleeping and “watching” (as sleeplessness or nocturnal wakefulness was commonly termed), could cause a temporary or permanent imbalance of the humours and was severely harmful to the mind and the body. According to the English physician and translator Thomas Phaer, it was even the reason behind the plague.<sup>11</sup>

6 One improper application of the non-naturals that early moderns were warned against was insufficient sleep which, as Carroll Camden’s survey of medical opinions finds, “debilitates the animal spirits, hinders digestion, and makes the body apt to consumptions.”<sup>12</sup> Sleeplessness and sleep deprivation were thought to dry up body and brain and to “burne the humors”;<sup>13</sup> this could lead to a series of illnesses including madness and melancholy, for “[n]othing increased black bile trouble more than prolonged insomnia.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, melancholics were thought to be particularly susceptible to sleeplessness “because of the continual cares, fears, and sorrows with which their dry brains afflict them.”<sup>15</sup> Robert Burton, for example, listed insomnia as a symptom of melancholy, because their “hot and dry braines” meant that melancholics had difficulty sleeping.<sup>16</sup> Early modern writings thus suggest that sleeplessness was part of a vicious cycle, being produced by illness and causing (further) illness and detriment of the same kind. It is therefore not surprising that many medical texts tried to provide cures for sleeplessness, and these included soothing the bed with leaves of cool plants, eating lettuce, and using fumigations made of horsehair.<sup>17</sup>

7 Early modern medical writers also frequently observed that insomnia could lead to phantasms, hallucinations, and waking dreams. Burton wrote that “they that much fast, or want sleep, as melancholy and sicke men commonly doe, they see visions or such as are very timorous by nature, or mad and distracted.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Petrus Pomarius Valentinus noted that “too much watching is hurthfull to the braine: it doth debilitate and weaken the senses: it doth burne the humors, and is the cause of sharpe diseases: sometimes of frensies, of madnesse, melancholy, and deliriums.”<sup>19</sup> Melancholy, caused by a lack of sleep, was in itself widely recognised as the reason for hallucinations, vain imaginations, and strong dreams.<sup>20</sup> As André du Laurens explained, this was because, in melancholic men, “spirits and blacke vapours continually passe by the sinewes, vaines and arteries, from the braine vnto the eye, which causeth it to see many shadowes and vntrue apparitions in the aire.”<sup>21</sup>

8 While sleeplessness and hallucinations in themselves already constituted physiological as well as mental ailments, the challenges posed by the ability of dreams and hallucinations to make people mistake illusion for reality, thereby rendering perception and cognition questionable, added an equally disturbing epistemological dimension to them. Timothy Bright, for instance, stated in *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) that the objects perceived as part of a dream could appear “as if [they] were represented unto us brode awake,” and that dreams were capable of making the past and the future seem as though they were the present.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hill, for his part, pointed out that dreams could cause “the outward sences [...] [to] perceyue the inwarde far bigger, whereof the common sence or other virtue dreamynge is deceyued, in that he iudgeth those to be of other sensible matters, then in dede they be.”<sup>23</sup> Writings like the ones cited contributed to an intellectual and cultural climate in which Shakespeare was able to draw on a physiological link between sleeplessness and sensory illusions to help



amplify his characters' self-inflicted sufferings. In *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, this led to a near-physiological examination of Brutus's and Lear's experiences of misfortune, and placed the characters' extreme states of body and mind at the centre of tragedy.

## II

9 When composing *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare added to the unfolding of Brutus's tragedy a focus on his growing inability to sleep. From early on in the play, Brutus's leadership in the conspiracy against Caesar is associated with an awakening. In a letter to him, Cassius writes: "Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake and see thyself" (2.1.46).<sup>24</sup> Cassius here speaks metaphorically and refers to Brutus's political awakening, through which the latter becomes conscious of his duty to remove Caesar. Instantly after reading the letter, however, Brutus makes clear that his political awakening has led to physical sleeplessness: "Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar / I have not slept" (2.1.61-62). In the same scene, he is heard envying Lucius's ability to sleep peacefully: "I would it were my fault to sleep so soundly" (2.1.4). Brutus later explains that Lucius "sleep[s] so sound" (2.1.232) because, unlike himself, he has "no figures, nor no fantasies / Which busy care draws in the brains of men" (2.1.230-231). Even though Brutus, in his sense of political duty, refers to sleep as a "fault," he thus expresses his wish to be able to commit such a mistake. Throughout the play, the sleepiness of Lucius, a character invented by Shakespeare, creates a contrast with Brutus's insomnia and with the conspirators' nightly activity. The association of Brutus with sleeplessness, in turn, is derived from the main source text for the play, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579), which notes: "when others slept, or thought what would happen the morrowe after: he fell to his booke, and wrote all day long till night".<sup>25</sup> Plutarch in that respect portrays Brutus as "having framed his manners of life by the rules of virtue and studie of Philosophie."<sup>26</sup> As in Shakespeare, Brutus's sleeplessness is here related to his sense of political duty and to his neglect of physiological needs.

10 In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus's inability to enjoy nocturnal rest is again exhibited when his fellow conspirators visit him in his orchard at night, and Cassius, seemingly conscious of the importance of sleep, begins by wondering whether they might be "too bold upon [Brutus's] rest" (2.1.86). Brutus's response is telling: "I have been up this hour, awake all night" (2.1.88). They then instantly proceed to their business of removing Caesar, which continues to impede Brutus's sleep. There are two layers of meaning to the watchfulness caused by Brutus's metaphorical and political awakening. One is psychophysiological, as his worries and deliberations – his "busy care" (2.1.231) – keep him awake. The other meaning relates to the expectation of hypervigilance in a position of power. Whilst it is self-evident that any human being needs sleep, sovereigns in particular were expected to be watching constantly over the nation – an idea with which sleep, in certain settings and circumstances, seems difficult to reconcile. James I in that respect advised his son Charles that a king ought to be "a great watchman and shepheard", and that "his eye must neuer slumber nor sleepe for the care of his flocke, euer remembering that his office, being duely executed, will prooue as much *onus* as *honos* unto him."<sup>27</sup> Referring to early modern kingship, Benjamin Parris moreover explains that "sleep creates an image of human imperfection in the sovereign body natural": "bodily life in sleep resembles death, and so the king's mortality resurfaces, even though his body natural's flaws are supposedly taken up and wiped away by the presence of the body politic."<sup>28</sup> Whereas the unification of the natural body with the body politic upon ascending the throne gave the sovereign a spiritual existence and made him God's ordained agent on earth, sleep had the potential to nullify or reverse this process in the public eye, at least temporarily. When considered in this context,



Brutus's insomnia indicates that he is slowly moving into the role of the ruler and adopting the responsibilities that come with it; his sleeplessness is thus indicative of his active pursuit of political ambitions.<sup>29</sup>

11 Shakespeare is clear, however, that Brutus's politics come at a cost, and the representation of his sleeplessness is in that respect much more than a mere visualisation of his political concerns and sense of duty. In the play, Brutus is eventually confronted by his wife Portia about the reasons behind his altered behaviour which, she says, includes musings, fits of anger, and increased moments of emotional distance (2.1.236-250). Portia also observes a connection between her husband's distress and his sleep practices, stating: "It will not let you eat, nor talk, nor sleep" (2.1.251). It is significant that Portia evokes the non-naturals of sleep and food, the inappropriate application of which was believed to alter the body's humoral balance. In fact, she reaches that very conclusion: "it hath much prevailed on your condition" (2.1.253); "Is Brutus sick, and is it physical / To walk unbraced and suck up the humours / Of the dank morning?" (2.1.260-262). Brutus's insomnia, caused by his mental distress and by his political deliberations, has thus made him sick, changed his disposition, and made him vulnerable to the noxious vapours that were thought to exist in the nightly environment and which could influence the balances of body and mind: to Portia, they are "the vile contagion of the night" and must be avoided (2.1.264).

12 Shakespeare's account of this exchange between Brutus and Portia, like the plot in its near-entirety, is derived from North's translation of Plutarch. North writes:

[E]ither care did wake [Brutus] against his will when he would have slept, or else oftentimes of him selfe he fell into suche deepe thoughtes of this enterprise [of assassinating Caesar], casting in his minde all the daungers that might happen: that his wife lying by him, founde that there was some marvelous great matter that troubled his minde.<sup>30</sup>

13 Both Shakespeare's tragedy and Plutarch's historical account thus connect Brutus's inability or unwillingness to sleep to his political undertaking. A marked difference between the two versions of Brutus and Portia's conversation, however, resides in the absence of humoral theory from North's translation, whereas it is always present in Portia's observations in *Julius Caesar*. In fact, Plutarch's Portia instantly proceeds to asking Brutus about the enterprise that is troubling him, and even though she perceives that he is "marvelouslie out of quiet" and that he can "take no rest," the physiological descriptions are in Plutarch's passage much less pronounced than in Shakespeare's adaptation of it in *Julius Caesar*, where Brutus's insomnia and the emphasis on his humoral imbalance convey the playwright's interest in the personal and psychophysiological consequences arising from Brutus's ultimately tragic actions.<sup>31</sup>

14 The importance attributed by Shakespeare to Brutus's sleeplessness becomes clear from the fact that the playwright, having made it a central theme in Act 2, again gave it prominence in Act 4, Scene 3. Here, Brutus, in conversation with Lucius, asks the latter whether he is "o'erwatched," because he speaks "drowsily" (4.3.238-239). When Brutus invites him, Varrus, and Claudio to sleep in his tent, Lucius counters that he has "slept [...] already" (4.3.261), to which Brutus responds: "It was well done, and thou shalt sleep again" (4.3.262). Their exchange is intriguing because Brutus projects his own need to sleep onto Lucius; in actual fact, Brutus himself is "o'erwatched." For example, when a book that he has been searching for is found in his gown, he admits that he is "much forgetful" (4.3.253); forgetfulness was in the Renaissance recognised as a consequence of sleep deprivation.<sup>32</sup> Brutus's return to his reading after Lucius has fallen asleep (4.3.271-272) illustrates that the deliberations that preoccupy him in Act 2 are still keeping him awake at night.



15 Immediately after Brutus has resumed his reading by a flickering candle, he is arguably faced with the consequences of disregarding early modern medical advice about sleeping and watching moderately, and at the proper times, when the ghost of Caesar appears to him (4.3.272-271).<sup>33</sup> Brutus confronts and challenges it, and the spirit, before vanishing, announces that it will appear again at Philippi (4.3.281). When calling Lucius, Varrus, and Claudio and questioning them about why they have allegedly cried out, they all assure him that they have been sleeping and that they have not witnessed anything unusual. The question is raised for the audience of whether Brutus is visited by a real spirit or whether he merely has a waking dream prompted by his sleep deficiency and his weakened senses. Brutus himself at first believes it to be the latter: "I think it is the weakness of mine eyes / That shapes this monstrous apparition" (4.3.274-275). At the battle of Philippi, however, as Brutus's defeat becomes increasingly inevitable, his scepticism recedes: "O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet. / Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords / In our own proper entrails" (5.3.94-96). Later, he reports that the ghost of Caesar has indeed reappeared to him (5.5.17-19). Brutus's interpretation of his visions thus evolves from a sceptical perspective to an assumption that he is being haunted by Caesar's genuine ghost, eager for revenge. From the viewpoint of the audience, Brutus's conflicting readings create interpretive uncertainty, and the ghost's true nature consequently becomes ambiguous. As David Bevington writes, "Shakespeare's ghosts, being dramatic creations, occupy an ambiguous world of art that invites us to speculate about their relation to the mundane world."<sup>34</sup>

16 An attempt to enlighten this opacity can be made by consulting the source for this play. Like Shakespeare, Plutarch frames Brutus's vision with an account of his sleeplessness: "Brutus was a carefull man, and slept very litle, both for that his dyet was moderate, as also bicause he was continually occupied. He never slept in the day tyme, and in the night no lenger."<sup>35</sup> It is during one such sleepless night that Brutus sees "a wonderfull straunge and monstrous shape of a body comming towards him."<sup>36</sup> In contrast to Shakespeare's play, where the ghost tells Brutus that it is his "evil spirit" (4.3.280), but where a stage direction and Brutus himself identify it as the spirit of Caesar (4.3.272.1; 5.5.17), Plutarch does not specify that it was Caesar's ghost. The most intriguing fact about the account of Brutus's vision in the *Lives*, however, relates to a passage that Shakespeare chose not to adopt, but which would nonetheless have been read by him and could have influenced the representation of the ghost in his play. After describing the appearance of the spirit, Plutarch narrates how Brutus went to see Cassius the following day, who provided a rational explanation for this occurrence:

Cassius beeing in opinion an Epicurian [...] spake to him touching his vision thus. In our secte, Brutus, we have an opinion, that we doe not always feele, or see, that which we suppose we doe both see and feele: but that our senses beeing credulous, and therefore easily abused (when they are idle and unoccupied in their owne objects) are induced to imagine they see and conjecture that, which they in truth doe not. For, our minde is quicke and cunning to worke (without eyther cause or matter) any thinge in the imagination whatsoever. And therefore the imagination is resembled to claye, and the minde to the potter: [...] And this doth the diversitie of our dreames shewe unto us. [...] But yet there is a further cause of this in you. For you being by nature given to melancholick discoursing, and of late continually occupied: your wittes and sences having bene overlabeled, doe easilier yeelde to such imaginations. For, to say that there are spirits or angells, and if there were, that they had the shape of men, or such voyces, or any power at all to come unto us: it is a mockerye.<sup>37</sup>



Plutarch's emphasis on Cassius's Epicurean background relates to the fact that, in the classical world, Epicureans did not believe in vatic visions or supernatural visitations, as



opposed to the Stoics, who defended the possibility of dream divination, for example.<sup>38</sup> In line with his beliefs, Cassius in Plutarch's account evokes the unreliable and deceptive nature of human perception: he suggests that dreams are instances where our minds are tricked into believing that a real object has been apprehended by our senses, and he associates dreams and phantasms with the bodily humours. Brutus is in that respect portrayed as being of a melancholic disposition, which was viewed as the mood most conducive to strong dreaming and to hallucinations.

18 For the purpose of this discussion, the most interesting cause for Brutus's vision is the one that Cassius mentions last: Cassius notes that Brutus has lately been so occupied with political and military matters – his melancholic temper has in that respect made him even more focused on his troubles – that his “wittes and senses” have become “overlabored.” The fact that Brutus is thus “o'erwatched” has made him increasingly prone to imaginings like the appearance of the spirit which, as Cassius concludes, is merely a “mockerye.” This view is consistent with the opinions expressed by Pomarius and Burton that too much watching could lead to debilitated senses, to melancholy, and to deliria.<sup>39</sup> The idea of a debilitation of the senses also mirrors Brutus's initial stance in *Julius Caesar* that the apparition is the result of a “weakness of [his] eyes” (4.3.274-275).

19 In Shakespeare's play, the possible naturalistic reading of Caesar's ghost is further sustained by an explicit warning about the reliability of sensory perception. After Cassius has instructed Pindarus to stab him on the incorrect assumption that his ally Titinius is being surrounded and defeated by the triumvirs' forces – in fact, the conspirators' fortunes appear to have changed instantly after Cassius's voluntary death (5.3.51-53) – Messala exclaims:

O hateful Error, Melancholy's child,  
Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men  
The things that are not? O Error, soon conceived,  
Thou never com'st unto a happy birth  
But kill'st the mother that engendered thee (5.3.67-71).

20 The description of “Error” as “Melancholy's child” reflects the association of melancholy with vain imaginings and baseless thoughts; the suggestion is that melancholic moods make one prone to misperceptions and misconceptions. Whilst Messala's words primarily relate to Cassius's misreading of his forces' fortunes, the appearance of Caesar's ghost, given its dramatic energy, continues to loom large at this stage of the play; only a few lines later Brutus attributes his defeat to the spirit (5.3.94-96). Additionally, sleep deprivation, from which Brutus suffers, was thought to produce the same melancholic humour that is here associated with false sensory perception. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there is an intended connection between Messala's thoughts about seeing “things that are not” and the appearance of Caesar's ostensible revenge ghost.

21 A psychophysiological explanation of the spirit in Shakespeare's play is thus supported by Brutus's initial naturalistic reading, by Cassius's words in North's translation of Plutarch, by the fact that the first appearance of Caesar's ghost in both Plutarch and Shakespeare occurs after Brutus is depicted as “o'erwatched,” and by the play's reminder that the senses are not always to be trusted. A supernatural reading, conversely, may be sustained by the play's connection with the revenge tragedy genre, by the explicit staging of the spirit (see stage direction at 4.3.272.1), and by the prominent supernatural framework. Indeed, Shakespeare's play features a large number of ostensible portents and prophecies, including the soothsayer's words that Caesar should “beware the Ides of March” (1.2.18), the various unusual occurrences witnessed



in the run-up to the murder (1.3), and Calphurnia's dream (2.2). There is also Cassius's notable change of heart at the end when he renounces his Epicurean scepticism towards omens and premonitions (5.1.76-78). All of these events, however, are problematised in the play: Calphurnia's dream is interpreted by Calphurnia and Decius in completely different ways (and, in Decius's case, according to a political agenda); the omens during the night before the murder are first dismissed by Cicero (1.3.34-35) and then manipulated by Cassius when, in an attempt to convince Caska of the need to remove Caesar, he declares them warnings against Caesar's tyranny (1.3.62-78); and Cassius's rethink only occurs once his military defeat becomes apparent and inevitable. Like Brutus's progressive acceptance of Caesar's ghost as real, Cassius's behaviour can in fact be seen to illustrate Edgar's words in *King Lear* that, "when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeit of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars" (2.110-113). Both Cassius's and Brutus's reconsiderations epitomise Shakespeare's depiction of a world in which human characters only turn to imagined higher powers at times of self-inflicted distress. As is evident from all of these examples, Shakespeare's treatment of the supernatural in *Julius Caesar* is highly ambiguous. This is also true for Caesar's ghost, because, rather than providing a definitive answer, the play here supplies two distinct possibilities, and audiences and readers are encouraged to reach their own conclusions.<sup>40</sup> In a play conscious of its Senecan influences, and set in ancient Rome, this dramatic approach puts into doubt the supernatural nature of Caesar's ostensible spirit, because the status of a revenge ghost would in this context not normally be open to debate.<sup>41</sup>

22 Contrasting Shakespeare's narrative with Plutarch's depiction of Brutus's defeat as the product of divine will, Ernest Schanzer writes: "At Philippi it is not [...] the providential scheme of Plutarch and Dante which defeats Brutus and Cassius, but their human flaws, which make Brutus give the word for attack too early, and make Cassius slay himself rashly, in premature despair."<sup>42</sup> Given Shakespeare's interest in human flaws, misreadings, and misjudgements, as well as in the characters' self-inflicted sufferings, a waking phantasm caused by Brutus's insomniac and despairing condition – which, crucially, is how Brutus himself at first interprets his vision (4.3.274-275) – arguably better accommodates Shakespeare's tragic model than would a real ghost; the apparition, dramatically one of the most powerful moments in the play, is the by-product of Brutus's troublesome political undertaking, either in the form of a symptom of his mental and bodily strain, or as an expression of his guilty conscience. Whilst it is true that the concepts of guilt and conscience blur the boundaries between the psychological and the spiritual or supernatural – an important early modern assumption held that the soul was infused by God, which led to a permanent presence of divinity in humans, with feelings of guilt representing God's judgement on our thoughts and actions – Shakespeare seems deliberately ambiguous about the question of whether or not Brutus's actions are wrong; as Coppélia Kahn notes, it is impossible to decide whether Caesar was "a tyrant who deserved to die" or whether Brutus was a "misguided idealist."<sup>43</sup> The ambiguous status of Caesar's ghost underlines the play's reluctance to answer this question of right and wrong conclusively. Nevertheless, the possibility of reading Brutus's vision as an expression of his guilty conscience does add a further, spiritual dimension to the character's extant psychological and physiological suffering. McAlindon writes that "Shakespeare conceives of his tragic characters as individuals to be remembered less for their errors and misdeeds than for the sufferings and griefs they endure in consequence."<sup>44</sup> In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's exploitation of the notion of waking dreams caused by sleep deprivation strengthens the emphasis on Brutus's self-inflicted suffering whilst withholding the more explicit condemnation that the staging of an unambiguous supernatural intervention would convey.



## III

23 Ideas of sleeplessness and dreaming again perform important roles in *King Lear*, where they belong to a physiological discourse of tragedy that also involves the king's famous madness, the allusions to which are ubiquitous. When Lear in the first scene unjustly disinherits Cordelia and "disclaim[s] all [his] paternal care" (1.105), for example, Kent defends his opposition to Lear's decision by exclaiming: "Be Kent unmannerly / When Lear is mad" (1.136-137). From the very beginning, Lear's deranged state is also associated with what Regan terms "the infirmity of his age" (1.282). Lear himself eventually notices the madness coming upon when his appeal to higher powers fails and he cries out: "O, let me not be mad, sweet heaven ! / I would not be mad" (5.42-43).<sup>45</sup> Later, after Gonoril and Regan demand that he abandon his train of knights (7.359-421), he tells his companion: "O fool, I shall go mad" (7.444).

24 Lear's madness is a central part of Shakespeare's representation of human suffering in this tragedy, and it is suggested that the king's madness is exacerbated by his sleep deprivation. Lear is first associated with (prolonged) sleeplessness, albeit implicitly, when he is shown awake and outside during a nightly tempest. The disguised Kent on this occasion repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, begs him to come inside, telling him that "The tyranny of the open night's too rough / For nature to endure" (11.2-3). Lear's wakefulness cannot be explained by the doctrine of kingly hypervigilance, because he has abandoned his kingship and, having divided his realm, he has moreover come across as a negligent sovereign. While this particular case of nocturnal wakefulness on its own may merely constitute a tenuous reference to insomnia, it becomes much more significant when considered alongside Scene 18. Here, Cordelia describes her father as "as mad as the racked sea, singing aloud, / Crowned with rank fumitory and furrow-weeds" (18.2-3), and asks a doctor how his sense may be restored. The physician's response makes explicit the connection between Lear's madness and his sleeplessness, and confirms that he has been lacking sleep throughout:

There is means, madam.  
Our foster-nurse of nature is repose,  
The which he lacks. That to provoke in him  
Are many simples operative, whose power  
Will close the eye of anguish (18.12-16).

25 The doctor's speech echoes contemporaneous medical assumptions about sleep in a series of ways: it describes "repose" as conducive to good health and sees it as a cure for madness (18.12-13); it associates sleeplessness with "anguish" (18.16); and it alludes to sleep-inducing herbal medicines (18.15-16).<sup>46</sup> The doctor's diagnosis is not surprising at this stage of the play, given that we have witnessed Lear and his train travelling restlessly from one daughter to another in the vain hope of being accommodated in dignity. It becomes clear that the king's madness is not exclusively related to his old age, but that it has been aggravated considerably by his sleep deprivation. Admittedly, Lear is seen sleeping in Scene 13, but even here his need for repose is emphasised when Kent urges him to "lie [down] a while" and asks Gloucester to "trouble him not; his wits are gone" (13.76, 80); this again suggests that the king is not getting enough sleep. Insomnia thus forms part of the vicious cycle in which Lear finds himself: his madness and distress have caused his sleeplessness, and the lack of repose has in turn further worsened his condition.

26 An interesting parallel in terms of the relationship between insomnia, madness, and tragedy exists between Shakespeare's *Lear* and Seneca's *Hercules Furens* (c. AD 54, translated by Jasper Heywood in 1561).<sup>47</sup> In Seneca's play, which Robert S. Miola sees as an influence on *Lear*, Hercules' madness is similarly coupled with sleeplessness and



restlessness (lines 924-926, p. 122-123; lines 1063-1081, p. 134-137), and it moreover causes the character to hallucinate (lines 939-991, p. 124-129).<sup>48</sup> In addition, Seneca's Hercules is ultimately cured by sleep (lines 1063-1144, p. 134-141), just like Shakespeare's *Lear*, a point to which I am going to return. When Hercules falls asleep, his foster father Amphitryon reasons that he "must have time for rest, so that deep sleep can overcome the violent sickness and relieve his burdened mind" (lines 1051-1052, p. 132-133); these words are echoed by the chorus, who calls on sleep to "soothe his exhaustion" (lines 1077-1078, p. 134-135): "let slumber fetter his unconquered limbs, and let it not leave his wild breast, till his mind regains its former tenor" (lines 1079-1081, p. 136-137). There is also, however, a major difference between Hercules and *Lear*: even if a psychological element can be read into Hercules' madness because it can be seen as the logical consequence of his pride, his madness in fact originates directly with the goddess Juno, who inflicts it upon him as a punishment while she seeks to avenge Jove's adulteries and prevent Hercules from seizing Heaven, as becomes clear from her prologue (lines 1-122, p. 48-59). It is even possible to pinpoint the exact moment when the madness arranged by Juno begins to affect Hercules (line 939, p. 124-125).<sup>49</sup> In Euripides' *Heracles* (c.416 BC), Seneca's source, Hera's agents Iris and Lyssa (the goddess of madness) even appear onstage immediately before the onset of Heracles' madness, and Heracles is cured by the goddess Pallas Athena when she hurls a stone at him and thereby casts him into a sleep.<sup>50</sup> *Lear*'s madness, in contrast, is wholly natural and progressive, and it does not involve any supernatural, retributive agency; the relationship between misfortune, insanity, and sleeplessness in *Lear* is part of a determinedly physiological discourse. This divergence is consistent with Shakespeare's wider rejection of the strong metaphysical and cosmic perspective found in classical tragedy.<sup>51</sup> It is emblematic of this redevelopment that Hercules kills his children as a result of Juno's supernaturally conferred madness, whereas *Lear* wrongs Cordelia in a moment of human rashness and error.<sup>52</sup>

27 Apart from emphasising *Lear*'s physical insomnia in order to add to the sense of the character's madness and suffering, Shakespeare also uses metaphorical allusions to sleep to help convey the king's despair and disbelief at his self-inflicted misery. This becomes clear from one of the most unsettling episodes for *Lear*, in Scene 4. Here, *Lear* is referred to by Oswald as Gonoril's father and not as king (4.74-76), is told that he has become "an O without a figure" (4.184), and is criticised by Gonoril for his "insolent retinue" (4.193) and for his worrying recent behaviour (4.196-200). All of this leads him to question his perception of the world around him: "Are you our daughter?" he asks Gonoril (4.210). His ontological uncertainty only deepens afterwards:

Doth any here know me ? Why, this is not Lear.  
 Doth Lear walk thus, speak thus ? Where are his eyes ?  
 Either his notion weakens, or his discernings  
 Are lethargied. Sleeping or waking, ha ?  
 Sure, 'tis not so.  
 Who is it that can tell me who I am ?  
 Lear's shadow ? I would learn that, for by the marks  
 Of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason  
 I should be false persuaded I had daughters (4.217-225, emphasis mine).

28 *Lear*'s evocation of sleep as an alternative to waking reality is intensely tragic; in the face of the misfortunes that afflict him as a result of his daughters' villainies, his portrayal of his reality as a dream constitutes a desperate refusal to accept his humiliation and disgrace. This is also shown by his insistence that "this is not Lear" (4.217) and by his reference to "Lear's shadow" (4.219); one meaning of the early modern word "shadow" is that of "actor" or "player", and thus the implication here is




not only that Lear has become a shadow of his former self, but also that he resists being an actor in his own tragedy. This language momentarily causes the theatrical illusion to collapse. Lear's refusal to trust his senses in this scene ultimately testifies to the pain he is suffering, and the metaphor of sleeping and dreaming therefore sharpens the focus on Lear's mental torment and helps to place it at the heart of the tragedy.

- 29 Lear's description in Scene 4 of his abilities to speak, see, and move as impeded and "lethargied" (4.220) echoes the early modern understanding of sleep as a deactivation, impotence, or death of the senses.<sup>53</sup> While sleep is comparable to (a temporary) death, it is, of course, not a literal form of death, and it ends in an awakening. In that respect, Shakespeare's use of the metaphor of a sleep or dream in the context of Lear's portrayal of his situation as so unbearable that he must either be sleeping or not be himself is not an isolated reference. In fact, Shakespeare returns to the idea of Lear's metaphorical sleep in Scene 21, and thereby allows ideas of sleeping and dreaming to frame part of the play. It is reasonable to assume that the soporific herbs prescribed by the doctor in Scene 18 (18.12-16), where Cordelia subsequently asks him to "seek for [Lear]" and be "aidant and remediate" in his "distress" (18.18-19), are administered to Lear, because in Scene 21, we find him sleeping in the presence of Cordelia, Kent, and the doctor. As he is woken up by Cordelia, he responds:

Where have I been ? Where am I ? Fair daylight ?  
I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity  
To see another thus. I know not what to say.  
I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see:  
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured  
Of my condition (21.50-55).

- 30 Lear's awakening here is a literal one, as he exits the physical state of sleep he has been in. At the same time, however, his awakening is also connected with the metaphorical sleep that he enters in Scene 4, and both his metaphorical falling asleep and his awakening here in Scene 21 are conveyed by means of detailed attention to the state of his senses. Lear's description in Scene 4 of his senses as "lethargied" is a powerful expression of his incredulity in the face of the horrors he is confronted with; given the severe pain that his sensory perception gives him, Lear questions it in its entirety. Upon awakening in Scene 21, he again incredulously verifies his sight and touch when he sees Cordelia before him, who urges him to "look upon [her]" and "hold [his] hands in benediction o'er [her]" (21.55-56). But Lear's sensory perception here is no longer so unbearable that he seeks to deny it; rather, it now allows him, entirely counter to his expectations, to see his daughter Cordelia again.

- 31 Alongside Lear's reunion and reconciliation with Cordelia and the victory over Gonoril and Regan, the king's literal sleep and awakening in Scene 21 momentarily interrupt the play's tragic movement and create the possibility of a tragicomic ending. This development can be attributed to the play's sources. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1137), Lear is successfully restored to the throne by the French, and only dies three years later (*Lear*, p. 17); and in the anonymous play *King Leir* (1594), too, the king is in the end "again possessed of [his] right" (*King Leir*, 1.2632, cited in *Lear*, p. 24).<sup>54</sup> In his own adaptation, however, Shakespeare added a further twist to the one he found in previous versions of the legend, thereby achieving a tragic ending; the seemingly tragicomic turn is reversed when the play ends with the deaths of Lear and Cordelia (24.248-310), and with Kent's stated intent to follow his master (24.316-317).

 It is consistent with Shakespeare's attention to medical conditions and cures in this play that the reinigorating properties of sleep contribute to an alleviation of the king's

madness and despair in Scene 21; Lear's regained ability to sleep is an important part of the temporary tragicomic mood in the play. Even if Lear's eventual recovery through sleep is prefigured when he briefly falls asleep in Scene 13, it is not until Scene 21 that he lastingly overcomes his sleep deprivation; "[h]e hath slept long", the doctor tells Cordelia (21.16). As well as leaving his tragic, metaphorical dream, Lear here exits his tragic state of insomnia. All of this happens in the context of a wider emphasis on ideas of hope and recovery in this scene. Cordelia, for example, preparing to kiss and wake her sleeping father, utters: "[R]estoration hang / Thy medicine on my lips" (21.24-25). The doctor, meanwhile, proclaims that "[t]he great rage / You see is cured" (21.76-77), and Lear indeed proves a changed man as he begs Cordelia for forgiveness (21.83). The scene's restorative atmosphere is prepared for when Cordelia's rhetorical questions provoke pathos by stressing the undeserved nature of Lear's suffering: "Had you not been their [Gonoril and Regan's] father, these white flakes / Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face / To be exposed against the warring winds [...]?" (21.28-34). Lear's repentant rhetoric, as he awakes, adds to this effect: "You do me wrong to take me out o'th' grave. / Thou art a soul in bliss" (21.43-44). This sense of remorse and amendment is also reinforced by the "soft music" playing in the background (21.0.1). Music was at the time thought of as an airy spirit that could invade the body and the soul; as Sarah F. Williams highlights, Francis Bacon "classifie[d] music as a 'voluptuary art' because it brings about changes to the mind and the passions."<sup>55</sup> Apart from conveying a sense of harmony and, in a dramatic setting, leading an audience to respond emotionally, music was in that respect recognised to have a potentially therapeutic effect; as John Case wrote in *The Praise of Musicke* (1586), "musick hath brought madde men into their perfect wits & senses," because it "aswageth and easeth the inordinate perturbations and euill affections of the mind."<sup>56</sup> In Scene 21 of *King Lear*, the restorative forces of sleep and music, and the weeping Cordelia's forgiving mood (21.55-57, 68), cure Lear's madness by combined mental, physical, and emotional means. The tragicomic moment of hope that this creates, however, is not only deceptive, but in fact exacerbates the ensuing tragic ending by offering a glimpse of what would or could have been if Cordelia and Lear had not died; as a result, the sense of pain, suffering, and injustice that is so central to this tragedy is only strengthened. Through Lear's unnatural sleep in "daylight" (21.50), which follows his equally unnatural wakefulness at night, perhaps even the hopeful Scene 21 warns us of the play's upside-down world where the dramatic twist at the end will not result in a resolution, but in ruin.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In both *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare's representations of insomnia, hallucinations, and metaphorical waking dreams underline the importance of suffering – whether deserved or undeserved – to his conception of tragedy. In both plays, these themes, informed by the wider early modern understanding of sleep, dreams, and sensory perception, provide a sharp focus on how the characters physically and mentally experience the tragic chain of events. This does not only help Shakespeare place the private and public sufferings produced by his characters' aspirations and shortcomings at the heart of his tragedies, but it also intensifies the audience's emotional engagement with events onstage, especially in *King Lear*. The ultimate outcome is a tragic universe that derives its energy less from ideas of fortune, metaphysical justice, and awe of supernatural forces than from a display of extreme states of body and mind.



## Notes

- 1 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Stanley Wells, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. All subsequent references are to this edition. Wells's edition is based on the play's quarto text and divides the play into scenes only, with no interpolation of act divisions.
- 2 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Thomson Learning, 2006, p. 2. All subsequent references to *Julius Caesar* are to this edition.
- 3 For discussions of dreams and sleep in the romances or late plays, see Ruth Nevo, *Shakespeare's Other Language*, London, Methuen, 1987, p. 32; Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, p. 139-220; William H. Sherman, "Shakespearean Somniloquy: Sleep and Transformation in *The Tempest*," in Margaret Healy and Tom Healy (eds.), *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing (1500-1650)*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 177-191; Garrett A. Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Garrett A. Sullivan, "Sleep, Epic, and Romance in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in Sara Munson Deats (ed.), *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 259-273. On dreams in the tragedies, see Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 15-25, 88-138; and Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 164-180.
- 4 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, Film*, trans. Elisabeth Bronfen and David Brenner, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 125-135; Tanya Pollard, "A Thing Like Death': Sleeping Potions and Poisons in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Renaissance Drama*, 32, 2003, p. 95-121.
- 5 On the importance of renditions of suffering to Shakespearean tragedy, see, for example, Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of Julius Caesar*, Measure for Measure, Antony and Cleopatra, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 57-63; Tom McAlindon, "What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?," in Claire McEachern (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 1-22, p. 10; and David Scott Kastan, "A rarity most beloved': Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy," in Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (eds.), *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2003, p. 4-22, p. 9-10.
- 6 Allison P. Hobgood, "Feeling Fear in *Macbeth*," in Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (eds.), *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 29-46, p. 30-31.
- 7 Michael Silk, "Shakespeare and Greek Tragedy: Strange Relationship," in Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Classics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 241-257, p. 244-245.
- 8 Michael Alexander, *Reading Shakespeare*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 122; T. McAlindon, art. cit., p. 6.
- 9 Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Sleep: Theory and Practice in the Late Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science*, 41.4, 1986, p. 415-441, here p. 417.
- 10 Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helth*, London, 1539, sig. 47r; Philippe de Mornay, *The True Knowledge of A Mans Owne Selfe*, trans. Anthony Munday, London, 1602, p. 27; Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton, London, 1576, sig. 56v.
- 11 Jean Goeurot, *The Regiment of Lyfe, Whereunto is Added a Treatise of the Pestilence*, trans. and augmented by Thomas Phaer, London, 1546, sig. M3r-v. The term "watching" may refer either to the deliberate action of staying awake or to the inability to sleep. The *OED* defines "watch (n.)" as the "voluntary or involuntary going without sleep" (I.1.a). On the early modern meanings of the term "watching," also see Erin Sullivan, "The Watchful Spirit: Religious Anxieties Toward Sleep in the Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington (1598-1658)," *Cultural History*, 1.1, 2012, p. 14-35, here p. 15-16.
- 12 Carroll Camden, "Shakespeare on Sleep and Dreams," *The Rice Institute Pamphlet*, 23.2, 1936, p. 106-133, here p. 116.
- 13 Petrus Pomarius Valentinus, *Enchiridion Medicum*, London, 1609, p. 34. Also see Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Oxford, 1621, p. 78; and Goeurot, *op. cit.*, sig. N1v-N2r. On the correlation between insufficient sleep and a dry body, also see T. Elyot, *op. cit.*, sig. 48r.
- 14 K. Dannenfeldt, art. cit., p. 436. Also see Valentinus, *op. cit.*, p. 16, 34.
- 15 C. Camden, art. cit., p. 116.
- 16 R. Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 231. Also see C. Camden, art. cit., p. 116.



- 17 For further examples of early modern cures for insomnia, see K. Dannenfeldt, art. cit., p. 435-438.

18 R. Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

19 Valentinus, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Also see Philip Barrough, *The Method of Phisicke, Containing the Causes, Signes, and Cures of Inward Diseases in Mans Body from the Head to the Foote*, London, 1583, p. 35-36.

20 See for example Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the Night or, A Discourse of Apparitions*, London, 1594, sig. C4v; P. Barrough, *op. cit.*, p. 35-36; Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, comm. Agostino Nifo, Venice, Hieronymus Scotus, 1551, fol. 105v, cited and translated in Angus Gowland, "Melancholy, Imagination, and Dreaming in Renaissance Learning," in Yasmin Haskell (ed.), *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2011, p. 53-102, p. 53.

21 André du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*, trans. Richard Surphlet, London, 1599, p. 92.

22 Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, London, 1586, p. 118-119.

23 Thomas Hill, *The Moste Pleasaunte Arte of the Interpretacion of Dreames*, London, 1576, sig. C8r.

24 Shakespeare's account of Cassius's letter echoes Plutarch's: "Thou sleepest Brutus, and art not Brutus in deede." See Plutarch, "The Life of Julius Caesar," in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. Sir Thomas North, cited in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), 8 vols, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, vol. V, p. 58-89, p. 82.

25 Plutarch, "The Life of Marcus Brutus," in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. T. North, cited in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 90-132, p. 92.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

27 King James IV and I, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 239.

28 Benjamin Parris, "'The Body is with the King, but the King is not with the Body': Sovereign Sleep in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 40, 2012, p. 101-142, here p. 102.

29 On the issue of two ostensibly distinct geographical and cultural worlds – classical/pagan and early modern/Christian – that arises from a play like *Julius Caesar*, it is important to note that the Roman tragedies largely speak to early modern politics especially in the dying years of the reign of Elizabeth I. See, for example, Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 1-53, 154-183; Manfred Pfister, "Acting the Roman: *Coriolanus*," in Maria Del Sapio Garbero (ed.), *Identity, Otherness and Empire in Shakespeare's Rome*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 35-48, p. 35-7; and E. A. J. Honigmann, *Myriad-Minded Shakespeare: Essays on the Tragedies, Problem Comedies and Shakespeare the Man*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, p. 21.

30 Plutarch, "Life of Marcus Brutus," *op. cit.*, p. 98.

31 *Ibid.*

32 See, for example, Andrew Boorde, *A Compendyous Regyment, or A Dyetary of Healthe*, London, 1547, sig. B3v-B4r.

33 Thomas Cogan warned explicitly against staying out of bed for too long after supper. See Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health*, London, 1584, p. 16.

34 David Bevington, *Shakespeare's Ideas: More Things in Heaven and Earth*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, p. 135.

35 Plutarch, "Life of Marcus Brutus," *op. cit.*, p. 115.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 116-117.

38 See Simon R. F. Price, "The Future of Dreams: From Freud to Artemidorus," *Past and Present*, 113, 1986, p. 3-37, here p. 12.

39 Valentinus, *op. cit.*, p. 34; R. Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

40 In Plutarch, the spirit is associated with the gods' disapproval of Brutus's actions ("Life of Julius Caesar," *op. cit.* p. 89), but it is also explained in physiological terms ("Life of Marcus Brutus," *op. cit.* p. 116). Shakespeare may well have derived inspiration from this ambiguity and developed it further.

41 The dim candlelight (4.3.273), which ostensibly indicates the presence of a spirit (also see note to 4.3.273, p. 343), is ambiguous: it may well be imagined by Brutus, not least because an





audience could not have discerned any such effect in daylight on the outdoor Globe stage.

42 E. Schanzer, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

43 Coppélia Kahn, “Shakespeare’s Classical Tragedies,” in McEachern (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 204-223, p. 212. On the belief that the soul was infused by God, see, for example, Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (1636; pub. 1643), cited in C. A. Patrides (ed.), *Sir Thomas Browne: The Major Works*, London, Penguin, 1977, p. 153. Also see Charles B. Schmidt, Quentin Skinner, and Eckhardt Kessler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 484.

44 T. McAlindon, art. cit., p. 16.

45 For additional references to Lear’s madness, see 14.44; 16.42; 20.80; 20.271.

46 For a reference to sleep as a cure for madness, see P. Barrough, *op. cit.*, p. 35. For the connection between insomnia and anguish, see R. Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 779-780. According to Dannenfeldt, early modern herbal remedies for sleeplessness included “heads and seeds of the white poppy”, “rose vinegar”, and “camphor” (K. Dannenfeldt, art. cit., p. 436). On Shakespeare’s wider deployment of early modern medical knowledge, see Frederick J. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1992.

47 All references are to *Hercules Furens*, in *Seneca: Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra*, ed. and trans. John G. Fitch, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2002.

48 Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 92-121, 159-174.

49 For a discussion of Hercules’ supernaturally induced madness, also see Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger’s Privilege*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 47-48.

50 Euripides, *Heracles*, in *Euripides: Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998, lines 815-874, p. 387-393; lines 1001-1005, p. 404-405.

51 The play’s concern with human nature at the expense of the supernatural is also recognised by McAlindon and Wells, for example. See T. McAlindon, art. cit., p. 18; *Lear*, p. 35.

52 In *Hercules Furens*, Juno even declares that she will “guide the madman’s weapons” (line 120, p. 56-57). Amphitryon tells Hercules at the end that Juno used his hands to kill his children (line 1297, p. 154-155), and that “grief is [his], but the crime is [his] stepmother’s” (lines 1200-1201, p. 146-147).

53 See for example T. Cogan, *op. cit.*, p. 236. Lear’s attempt to establish whether he is waking or sleeping echoes Sly’s words in *The Taming of the Shrew*. See W. Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. H. J. Oliver, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, Induction 2, lines 66-70. Lear’s words also foreshadow the later blinding of Gloucester in the tragedy.

54 For a discussion of Shakespeare’s rewriting of the King Lear story from the perspective of genre, see Stephen J. Lynch, “Turning Genre on Its Head: Shakespeare’s Refashioning of his Sources in *Richard III*, *King Lear*, and *The Winter’s Tale*,” in Anthony R. Guleratne (ed.), *Shakespeare and Genre*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 121-136, p. 127-132.

55 Sarah F. Williams, “‘Singe the Enchantment for Sleepe’: Music and Bewitched Sleep in Early Modern English Drama,” in Christine Göttler and Wolfgang Neuber (eds.), *Spirits Unseen: The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern European Culture*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 179-196, p. 185.

56 John Case, *The Praise of Musicke*, Oxford, 1586, p. 56-58, 61.

57 André du Laurens warned in his “rules [that] are to be obserued in sleeping” that “Sleeping at nooneday is very dangerous, and maketh all the body heauie and blowne up.” (A. du Laurens, *op. cit.*, p. 189-190).

## Pour citer cet article

### Référence électronique

Claude Fretz, « “Either his notion weakens, or his discernings / Are lethargied”: Sleeplessness and Waking Dreams as Tragedy in *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* », *Études Épistémè* [En ligne], 30 | 2016, mis en ligne le 26 janvier 2017, consulté le 10 novembre 2021. URL :

